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RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 003491

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

SIPDIS
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. Iran

Key stories in the media:

The Jerusalem Post quoted senior diplomatic officials in Jerusalem as saying that the Israeli and Palestinian negotiators who will meet

in Jerusalem on Wednesday to kick off final-status negotiations will focus on process, procedure, and building a framework for the bilateral talks aimed at reaching an agreement. The sources were quoted as saying that nothing has yet been decided regarding the framework for the talks, though they are expected to begin in earnest following President Bush's planned visit in mid-January.

Media reported that the PA at first threatened to boycott the talks if Israel did not cancel a tender -- and later recanted threats -- to build 307 housing units in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Har Homa. Leading media reported that on Friday Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice criticized Israel for the construction plan.

Ha'aretz cited information obtained by the Foreign Ministry from Russian sources in recent days, according to which the U.S. supports holding a second peace conference in Moscow that would address Israel's conflicts with Syria and Lebanon as well as the Palestinian issue. Nevertheless, Ha'aretz quoted GOI sources in Jerusalem as saying they have some doubts about the Russian claim, as they have received contradictory reports from Washington. They added that they expect the situation to become clearer at next week's meeting of donor nations to the Palestinian Authority, as representatives of the Quartet of Middle East peacemakers -- the U.S., EU, UN, and Russia -- will meet on the sidelines to discuss whether to hold a Moscow conference and if so, when and in what format. Ha'aretz cited information received by the Foreign Ministry that that U.S. supports a regional conference that would also deal with the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. Ha'aretz reported that the conference would probably take place in April 2008 and would be at the level of foreign ministers.

The Jerusalem Post and Ha'aretz quoted Palestinian PM Salam Fayyad as saying on Monday that that he hopes that next week's donors conference to the PA will yield \$5.6 billion to stoke the economy and lay the basis for an independent state by 2011.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Monday PA officials in Ramallah expressed outrage with Saudi Arabia for hosting a senior Hamas delegation headed by Khaled Mashal.

Major media quoted Capt. John Kirby, a spokesman for visiting U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Michael Mullen, as saying on Monday that the intelligence estimate "made it clear that Iran did have a nuclear weapons program and that they are still enriching uranium." The Jerusalem Post reported that Mullen's remarks left the IDF with a feeling the Israel does not stand alone in the face of the Iranian nuclear threat, despite the recent NIE report. Maariv reported that Mullen was briefed on the IAF's offensive capability. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe quoted Mullen as saying that friends do not have to agree on everything.

Leading media reported that on Monday in Paris French President Nicholas Sarkozy told opposition leader MK Binyamin Netanyahu that the world must continue to press Iran over its nuclear program, including via a new UN Security Council resolution imposing tougher sanctions on Tehran. Yediot quoted senior sources in the entourage of PM Ehud Olmert as saying on Monday that Israel has no information that would contradict that Israeli assumption that Iran continues its efforts to develop nuclear weapons.

Leading electronic media reported that three Palestinian gunmen, members of Islamic Jihad's military wing, the Al-Quds Brigades, were killed in an Israeli air strike on Tuesday, after they opened fire at IDF forces operating near the town of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza. Two other IAF strikes left three Popular Resistance Committees members critically injured and wounded four Palestinians, according to local sources. The leading web site Ynet reported that dozens of Israeli tanks and bulldozers have entered the Strip. Ynet quoted the Israeli defense establishment as saying that this is not the large-scale operation that has been bandied about in recent weeks.

Ha'aretz reported that in late November Hamas's government in the Gaza Strip tightened its grip on three important civilian institutions: the court system, the municipality, and the Central Palestinian Bureau of Statistics. Ha'aretz says that in taking over these branches of governance, Hamas deepened the institutional rift between its dominion and the Fatah-led West Bank, enhancing the

Strip's character as a separate entity.

Major media reported that two men convicted of the 1992 assassination of four Iranian opposition figures in a Berlin restaurant have been released early from prison. The release of one of the men, Kazem Darabi, an Iranian, had been previously tied to information on missing IAF navigator Ron Arad.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Monday President Bush hosted Jewish leaders, including Deputy Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein and Rabbi Gershon Sizomu, the spiritual leader of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda, who had suffered religious persecution, as part of White House events commemorating Chanukah. Bush condemned the "ideology of hate" which he said the U.S. was fighting against, and told his guests that freedom of worship is a key American value.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Monday the right-wing group Human Rights in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza accused the state authorities of "trampling" on the rights of West Bank settlers and their supporters.

The Jerusalem Post quoted the International Monetary Fund as saying, in a report released on Monday by the Finance Ministry, that Israel must step up efforts to cut debt, reducing the economy's vulnerability to "external shocks and preserving the government's ability to fund welfare payments during an economic slowdown.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Israeli and Palestinian doctors met on Monday in East Jerusalem with World Health Organization officials in the territories, but ended up being bogged down by politics without agreeing on any concrete proposals. They had intended to find practical solutions to the health problems of Gaza residents.

Hamodi'a reported that applying for a U.S. non-immigrant visa will become more expensive, reaching \$131. The \$31 increase covers a fingerprinting fee.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the American Embassy's Foreign Commercial Service wants to double the number of Israelis studying in the U.S. The Israeli Fulbright program and a subsidiary of the Smile Internet Zahav web provider are associated with this program and will launch a special on-line portal where young Israelis can easily apply to hundreds of American institutions of higher education.

Ha'aretz presented the results of Tel Aviv University's Peace Index poll conducted among Jewish Israelis on December 3-4:

As in the past the main issues on which the public thinks the sides will have trouble reaching a compromise are (in rank order) Jerusalem and the fate of Palestinian refugees, although compared to the late 1990s, less weight is now ascribed to Jerusalem and considerably more is given to the refugee issue.

As in the past, the dominant view is that the Israeli government and people are interested in peace -- 78 and 80 percent, respectively. Surprisingly, though, now there is also a majority -- albeit a small one -- that says the PA under President Mahmoud Abbas also wants peace (55 percent). Regarding the desire for peace among the Palestinian people in general, opinions are divided, with a very slight lead on the positive side: 48 percent think the Palestinians want peace, while 45 percent think they do not.

Notwithstanding all the events of recent years, a majority of the Jewish public also views the Palestinians' demand for an independent state as justified -- 62 percent (compared to 34.5 percent who see it as unjustified). As in the past, there is also a majority -- 58 percent -- that is sure or thinks Israel can permit the establishment of an independent Palestinian state (32 percent think or are sure it cannot, and the rest do not know).

However, despite the positive attitude toward the two-state solution both in terms of justice and pragmatism, a large obstacle is the widespread belief among the Jewish Israeli public that even if a peace agreement is signed along these lines, it will not end the conflict with the Palestinians. Whereas 61 percent hold this pessimistic assessment, only 31 percent believe an agreement on two states would end the conflict from the Palestinians' standpoint. Furthermore, a large majority -- 71 percent -- believe it is impossible to reach a peace settlement with the Palestinians without Hamas's consent, with only 21 percent claiming the opposite. The

pollsters said that given the perception of Abbas' weakness, it is clear why this assessment also contributes to a lack of faith in the feasibility of a peaceful solution.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "In the face of all [right-wing efforts], the government and a majority of the public must respond clearly and confidently: 'Yes to concessions in Jerusalem, as distinguished from conceding Jerusalem.'"

Block Quotes:

"Holy Stones, not Stumbling Blocks"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (12/11): "The bargaining lines on the issues of borders and the refugees are clear. So will the distribution of blame for the negotiations' failure be, should Israel refuse to withdraw to the '67 lines and the Palestinians refuse to accept financial compensation for the refugees and settling them in their own state. Reaching arrangements on these two core issues would leave only Jerusalem, which was already debated at the Camp David conference held in the summer of 2000. The peace objectors, or those who speak in favor of peace but are unwilling to pay its price, are now forming a fortified wall around Greater Jerusalem. If their plan succeeds, they will convert the city of peace into an obstacle to peace. The method is simple, having been tried and tested repeatedly on the Israeli public, involving pulling out the slogan 'Peres/Barak/Olmert will divide Jerusalem.' Right-wing politicians, with the financial and political support of American rightist Jewish and Christian groups, launch a preemptive attack. They intend to sway public opinion, parts of the coalition that may support them, and the next Knesset elections. In the face of all these, the government and a majority of the public must respond clearly and confidently: 'Yes to concessions in Jerusalem, as distinguished from conceding Jerusalem.'"

2. Iran:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "If Israel sees no urgency, why should any other country? This impression needs to be corrected quickly, or the year ahead will be marked by Iranian advances rather than by increasing pressure on the world's most dangerous terrorist regime."

Columnist Calev Ben-David wrote in The Jerusalem Post: "Israel may have to act for its survival, is the message [Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike] Mullen received Monday. One wonders though, that even as he sat there politely listening to our concerns, what he really wanted to say in response was: 'Tell it to the Marines.'"

Columnist Yoaz Hendel wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe: "If the recent [NIE] report illustrates a 'different' thinking in the CIA, Mullen's visit shows that as far as he is concerned, common threats [to the U.S. and Israel] are real and existent."

Block Quotes:

I. "Missing the Urgency"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (12/11): "It is not possible ... to sound and turn off the alarm at the same time. If the U.S. indeed wants sanctions to be intensified, it must undo the self-inflicted damage it has caused to its own diplomacy."

It is not enough to say that Iran is 'still dangerous,' as Bush and his team have been doing. Rather, the NIE's bizarre attempt to distinguish between Iran's 'military' and 'civilian' nuclear program must be effectively reversed.... [President Bush has implied that] the Iranians' 'civilian' enrichment program is fundamentally military in nature, and their race to build a bomb, therefore, does not have to be 'resumed.' It is continuing right now. The Bush administration, if it is to achieve its declared policy goal of increasing pressure on Iran, must find a way to drive this point home, as difficult as this has become after the NIE's twisted analysis. Israel, for its part, needs to issue the equivalent of its own NIE, in whatever form, restating the largely agreed-upon facts: Iran has and continues to single-mindedly pursue nuclear weapons and is doing so overtly and perhaps also covertly.... For some time, Israel has tried to keep a somewhat low profile on the Iranian issue, in the hopes that the world would act appropriately on its own. This reticence may have been misinterpreted as a lack of urgency on Israel's part. And if Israel sees no urgency, why should any other country? This impression needs to be corrected quickly, or the year ahead will be marked by Iranian advances rather than by increasing pressure on the world's most dangerous terrorist regime."

II. "Attack Iran? Tell It to the Marines"

Columnist Calev Ben-David wrote in The Jerusalem Post (12/11): "Last week, in a Time magazine article titled 'Why the Pentagon is happy about the NIE,' Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was among the US military heads cited as being relieved that the release of the National Intelligence Estimate declaring that Teheran is not now developing nuclear weapons had seemingly taken the military option off the table. The reason is simple: With close to 190,000 American troops now in Iraq and Afghanistan, US military manpower is being stretched to the limit.... From Mullen's perspective, the last thing he needs right now is a new [front] with Iran. Sanctions and diplomacy, yes, but military action, no -- even if Israel acts on its own, since Iran would likely respond elsewhere in the region where American troops are in combat. And without American consent and cooperation, it is very unlikely Israel would be able to carry out any effective attack, certainly from the air, on Iran's nuclear facilities. Israel may have to act for its survival, is the message Mullen received Monday. One wonders though, that even as he sat there politely listening to our concerns, what he really wanted to say in response was: 'Tell it to the Marines.'"

III. "Identity of Interests"

Columnist Yoaz Hendel wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (12/11): "As one can remember, the invasion of Iraq started following a detailed report from the American intelligence agencies found that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. The army that quickly conquered Iraq was unable to find anything. Admiral Mullen's visit at this juncture, even if it was planned in advance, shows that there is an identity of interests between the U.S. Army and the IDF. If the recent [NIE] report illustrates a 'different' thinking in the CIA, Mullen's visit shows that as far as he is concerned, common threats are real and existent."

JONES